

Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

June 2012 Issue

A year of political changes

2011-12 was an interesting year on the provincial political scene. The year began with the Honorable Dave Hancock as Minister of Education, then in October we welcomed the Honorable Thomas Lukaszuk and finally, in May, we learned that the Honorable Jeff Johnson would assume the education portfolio. During the course of the year we also prepared for the New Education Act to be introduced in the Legislature and expected its passage, but were somewhat surprised in April when the Act died on the order paper because the provincial election was called. We trust that the enormous amount of excellent work which began with the “Inspiring Education” discussions almost five years ago will not be abandoned, and hope that the new Act will be forthcoming soon.

Extended terms for charter schools

Before Minister Lukaszuk moved from his ministerial position to become the Deputy Premier in May, we were pleased to learn that one of the association’s priorities was being addressed. Over the past five years, we have made a case for “permanence” and, while perhaps more “continuing” than permanent, the

Minister took steps to allow charter schools to apply for “extended terms” of 15 years rather than having to undergo formal evaluations every 5 years. Two of our schools have now been granted extended term status (Foundations for the Future Charter Academy and New Horizons Charter School), and it is expected that more will apply to the Minister in the upcoming year.



Members of the FFCA Board proudly displaying the province’s first-ever 15-year charter, presented in person by Education Minister Lukaszuk

Budget

While “permanence” has been a priority, so too has equitable funding and, to the concern of our members, when the new budget was announced March charter schools learned that with the move to “inclusive education” their funding was



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dramatically affected. Charter schools are inclusive by design and philosophically have not “coded” their students. We have, however, many who would qualify, and when Alberta Education based this year’s “inclusive education” funding on the numbers of coded students in the school, we were negatively impacted. We have voiced our concerns to Alberta Education and their officials are aware of the situation. We trust this will be addressed in the next budget.

Professional development

Another priority for the association is professional development and the sharing of innovative best practices. On October 18 and 19, TAAPCS members were able to attend Conference 2011 at the Coast Plaza Hotel and Calgary Science School. The theme for the event was “Celebrating and Sharing Innovative Practices”. Over 475 teachers/administrators/directors were in attendance. The evaluations for the conference were very positive. Much credit for this event’s success goes to the presenters from our schools and Alberta Education who so willingly shared their expertise and wisdom. The next conference will be held in October 2013.

Leadership development

In February, our association submitted a proposal to Alberta Education concerning school leadership development and were pleased to see our application was successful. The intent of this proposal is to utilize funds from Alberta Education to formulate an effective process for developing the leadership competencies of administrators. An expectation on the part of Alberta Education is that the process developed be adaptable by other jurisdictions in the province for use with their school leaders. Based upon seven competencies outlined in Alberta Education’s “School Leadership Framework”, we will provide opportunities for administrators to learn and practice the competencies in both a congregated setting and on the job. The concept of co-learners will be highlighted so that not only will school-based administrators have the opportunity to learn and grow, but so too will superintendents. This joint program involves individuals from TAAPCS, Alberta Education and the University of Calgary. Information is being circulated to administrators in June with the first workshop scheduled for September.

Board development

Still on the topic of professional development, several boards availed themselves of specifically



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designed workshops during the course of 2011-12. These workshops focused on the general theme of “governance” and were intended to provide opportunities for directors to not only learn about and discuss the characteristics of effective boards, but also to determine what, if any, steps might be taken in their own situation. As a follow-up to these workshops, delegates at the January TAAPCS meeting supported the concept of putting a workshop online through the TAAPCS website. This sample workshop was shared with our members in May and is now available at www.taapcs.ca. The dual intent is to allow individuals to “walk through” the module to learn more about effective board governance, while at the same time enable boards to determine if they wish to have TAAPCS provide a more in-depth workshop on the topic. For more information, please contact the Executive Director.

Choice and Innovation Award

Alberta’s public charter schools have a long and successful history of innovation and effective practice. Over nearly two decades, charter schools have received the benefit of the efforts of many individuals and groups who have contributed to ensuring that Alberta’s education system ranks among the best in the world. These

committed champions have not only been strong advocates for individual charter schools, but have worked in systemic ways in moving forward the charter school initiative within Alberta. In this regard, TAAPCS will, each year at its Annual General Meeting, recognize up to three individuals or groups who have:

- enhanced or highlighted innovations within one or more charter schools; and/or
- furthered the objectives of TAAPCS:
 - a. To promote and facilitate public charter school education in Alberta
 - b. To promote a forum for public charter schools to meet in support of common goals
 - c. To speak with one voice on behalf of public charter schools in Alberta
 - d. To advocate for continued innovation and choice within public education

Nominations are currently being invited for recipients of the 2012-13 awards. Closing date for the online applications is September 30, 2012. The winners will be announced during the week of October 8 with presentations to be made at the October 18 banquet celebration. Information has been sent to superintendents and board chairs. As well, please see the TAAPCS website for more information.

www.taapcs.ca



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Feature articles

Over the past two years, we have invited schools to submit short articles concerning any noteworthy events, accomplishments and/or research initiatives. We are pleased to have submissions from Judy Gray (FFCA Southeast Elementary Campus), Teresa Di Ninno (CAPE), Karen Spencer (Suzuki) and Ted Zarowny (New Horizons).



FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE – SOUTHEAST ELEMENTARY CAMPUS “A SCHOOL OF LEARNERS, SWIMMING IN CHARACTER”

We know that for many parents, the character program at Foundations for the Future Charter Academy is a determining factor in their choice of our school for their children. The program is immensely important to staff as well, as it provides a vehicle through which to have discussions and activities which focus on helping children “be the best people that they can be”.

The Southeast Elementary Campus (SEE) has recently been acknowledged by the US-based Character Education Partnership (CEP) with the awarding of a “Promising Practices” designation for the work of staff and students in their volunteer appreciation efforts through an annual “Gallery of Appreciation” event. This project involves the integration of classroom curricula with the character program and has, at its core, two major notions: the first being performances for parents by students, and the second being the creation of a legacy piece of art by graduating Grade 4 students. Parents move through the school, as if they were attending a gallery opening; enjoying food, refreshments and performances.

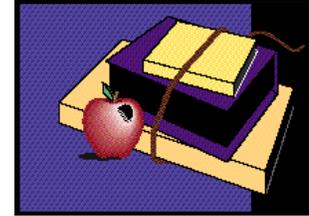
CEP has lauded the 2011 Gallery, the theme of which is “A School of Learners, Swimming in Character”. Classroom projects were inspired by the Leo Lionni book “Swimmy”, and the Grade 4 legacy project was additionally influenced by the artist Piet Mondrian. While studying and learning together for 5 years at SEE, Grade 4 students have learned about what character means to them and how they have worked together within this community to show their character in different ways.



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THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTEGRATION AND INDIVIDUALIZATION PROGRAM AT CAPE

In the spring of 1995, CAPE's first charter was structured with integration and individualization as its key educational elements. Although these fundamental principles within the charter have not changed, the implementation of these has evolved.



In the beginning, integration (based on Bloom's Taxonomy) was applied only to complementary subjects and the projects which teachers developed. By 1998, the integration methodology within the second language program was instituted so that direct connections with core subjects and electives were established. In 2006, Language/Social Studies and Mathematics/Science were integrated. September 2009 saw the introduction of the CAPE Total Integration Program.

Just as with integration, the individualization program was quite simplistic in September 1995. It too has evolved. CAPE not only has an enrichment program but, since 2003, a Gifted and Talented program. As of 2010, there is an Accelerated Reader Program and in 2011, the Accelerated Math Program was introduced.

Through systematic monitoring and assessment, including feedback from parents, students and staff, CAPE continues to refine its programs in an effort to more effectively address the needs of its students. For more information, please contact Teresa Di Ninno, Superintendent, or Jeney Gordon, Principal.



RESEARCH AT NEW HORIZONS SCHOOL

Research at New Horizons will focus on creative thinking; we will be seeing the degree to which what our school can impact creative thinking as measured by the Torrance Tests of Creativity.

We will conduct a school-wide pre-test in the fall of 2012 and in three years follow up with a post-test using a different form of the test. In the interim, we will be creating a Creative Challenge Index that will give us an indication of the degree to which we teach towards creative thinking skills. Different activities,



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programs, and classroom strategies will be weighted to determine our score on our index. In the end, we will see if there is a relationship between our Creative Challenge Index and the results of the Torrance Tests of Creativity. We will also check to see if there is any relationship to our Creativity Challenge Index and student achievement.

We will also be creating our own rubric that can be used by classroom teachers with relative ease. At the end of year three, we will compare the results of this tool against the results of the Torrance Tests of Creativity to see if our tool has some value and validity for classroom use.

At the same time, we are curious to see if teaching towards creativity will have a positive effect on the creative thinking of teachers. Teachers will also take the pre- test and post-test after three years of teaching towards creativity as a part of this question. Using a Creative Motivation Scale created by Torrance will assist us with this part of our research.

Related to creativity, especially creative problem-solving, is the ability to ask effective questions. Using the *Measure of Questioning Skills* we hope to verify whether or not the quality and quantity of student questioning can be impacted through classroom instruction. The practice of teaching students effective questioning skills can then be included on our Creative Challenge Index.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AT SUZUKI CHARTER SCHOOL

“Dr. Suzuki is like a scientist, experimenting constantly to find the best way to make a beautiful tone, and a beautiful heart.” – Van Werner

Suzuki Charter School is a strong champion of research and innovation using action research and formal research and its implementation to make a difference in the ability of our students to achieve.

- (1) Professional Learning Community (PLC) Meetings: Once a month, teachers at Suzuki Charter School get together for full day PLC meetings. Many of our shared initiatives are innovative and require risk-taking, exchange of ideas and cooperation, thus team building is essential as is openness to new ideas and a willingness to give and receive feedback.
- (2) Empower Program: Collaborative research and innovative programming are the foundation of the Empower Program within Suzuki Charter School. Twenty -six years of research and 10 pilot schools in Ontario have supported its success for students. Following consultation with University of Alberta professor, Dr. George Georgiou, we contacted Dr. Karen Steinbach, the leader of the research team at



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the Toronto Sick Kids Hospital. Through these collaborative relationships we have been able to access intensive reading intervention materials and training using video-conferencing technology. Aligned with the Suzuki philosophy, this step-by-step mastery approach brings together sequenced activities and reading strategies to build student confidence and facilitate reading mastery. Achievement, as well as parent and teacher feedback, was overwhelmingly positive; students who had been tested as achieving below grade level at the beginning of the year have attained their grade level, or surpassed it, following the intensive reading intervention.

- (3) Creative Mathematics: In September, teachers, Dale Szalacsi, Andrew Dueck and Tanya Giebelhaus began piloting the 10 Block Planning Schedule for Math Fact Fluency. This program uses music and songs to help students learn and remember the basic facts by incorporating activities with songs, dice, cards, number lines and hundred charts. Students practice and remember their facts daily in a quick and very fun way. We have plans to continue expanding its implementation next year.
- (4) 6+1 Writing Traits: Suzuki staff has been very fortunate to have Gr.5 teacher, Tarah Edgar, share her passion for writing within our staff meeting and PLC sessions. Her workshop sessions inspire us all to apply the 6+1 Trait Writing Model in inventive and engaging ways.
- (5) Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU): Inspired by teachers at the recent TAAPCS Conference, teachers, Tannis McCubbin and Andrew Dueck, began a pilot of the TGFU physical education program. This program has daily lesson plans for physical education. It puts the 'why' of the game before the 'how' when teaching games.
- (6) Emergent Literacy: A collaborative research project continues with Dr. Georgiou, University of Alberta Department of Educational Psychology, as part of a study involving Suzuki Charter School students and students in China regarding Emergent Literacy.
- (7) Suzuki Approach: Dr. Jacqueline Leighton, University of Alberta Department of Educational Psychology, has completed a proposal for a year-long research study to explore how the implementation of the Suzuki Approach within our program impacts student success. We look forward to working with her in the near future.
- (8) Superintendent, Lee Lucente, and Principal, Karen Spencer, have been invited to speak at the CASA Conference in Whistler in July on the topic of "Creativity and Innovation within the Charter School Context". We are excited to share research-based practice that makes charter schools such inspiring and dynamic environments for teaching and learning.



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A changing of the guard

Each year at this time we bid fond good byes and express our sincere appreciation to those who have contributed to our association. This year we say thank you to Megan O’Hara, Secretary-Treasurer of Westmount Charter School for her years of service to TAAPCS. Megan’s sense of corporate history, understanding and dedication to the organization will be missed. We also say thank you to Jim Rigby, Superintendent of New Horizons. Jim’s thoughtful, wise and gentle counsel at the executive table will be a loss for us. Thank you as well to Ray Battochio, Superintendent of Valhalla Community School. We benefitted greatly from Ray’s “can do” attitude and technological wizardry, especially where creating our first online PD module is concerned. Finally, we express our appreciation to Keith Jones, Superintendent of Almadina. Keith’s broad background in a variety of previous



roles was of great assistance to us as we sometimes moved into uncharted territory. Thank you and best wishes to Megan, Jim, Ray and Keith as you move on to new challenges and opportunities.

Also, TAAPCS lost an excellent friend and supporter this year when Merv Kurtz, retired superintendent of Westmount Charter School, passed away. Merv’s outstanding contributions to education in Alberta over the years are well known. A true gentleman, scholar and professional, Merv was a tireless defender of public education in general and charter schools in particular. Our condolences go out to Merv’s family. Newcomers to TAAPCS this year are currently being finalized as competitions proceed. However at the present time, we can extend a warm welcome to Yvonne DePeel, new superintendent of Almadina Language Charter School. We look forward to working with Yvonne in the future.

IMPORTANT UPCOMING MEETING DATES

September 14, 2012 – EAC, Red Deer
 September 20, 2012 – School Leadership Framework Meeting @ FFCA Central Office



October 18/19, 2012 – Regular Meeting and AGM, Calgary
 December 7, 2012 – EAC, Red Deer

